

The President's Daily Brief

2 May 1969

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I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

SOVIET AFFAIRS

Brezhnev took a remarkably conciliatory line on major foreign policy issues in his May Day speech. In the key paragraph he specifically endorsed "the solution of international problems through talks." He then listed as the principal items in the Soviet program a restriction of the arms race, liquidation of the hotbeds of war in Europe, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East, and the easing of international tensions. There was no reference either to an ideological or a direct military threat from the West.

On Vietnam, Brezhnev said only that the "patriots" fighting there knew that they had the "sympathy and support of the Soviet people." He did not mention the US by name or call for "expulsion of the imperialists" as Grechko did last year. His statements on the Middle East and Europe were equally temperate, with no reference to the customary whipping boys--Israel, West Germany, and NATO.

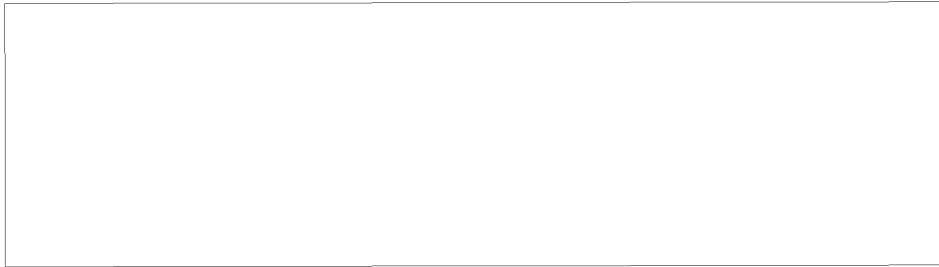
The Soviet leadership probably had several reasons for choosing to show the world a more benevolent image. Today's position contrasts with the Chinese attitude, lessens the opprobrium of Soviet behavior in Czechoslovakia, and thereby strengthens Moscow's position at the forthcoming International Communist Conference.

It may also have been designed to further a US-Soviet dialogue.

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Elaborate security precautions in Prague prevented significant May Day protests against the new leadership of Gustav Husak. The police probably will remain on alert until after 9 May, the anniversary of the Soviet liberation.

In his May Day speech Husak attempted to break the country's mood of hopelessness, frustration, and uncertainty. He hinted that as a result of his talks with Soviet leaders at last week's CEMA summit the issue of Soviet troop withdrawal might be negotiable--which could win him some support from the "wait-and-see" group in the population.

EUROPE

Pompidou's lead in the presidential race has been widened by the decision of Valery Giscard d'Estaing and his Independent Republicans to support him. Giscard, who broke with the Gualists over the referendum, was apparently promised an important cabinet post.

Giscard's support breaks into the loose and inchoate center elements from which Pompidou will need significant support. This apparently will also be forthcoming. Centrist leader Pierre Sudreau says that Jacques Duhamel, leader of the center

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parliamentary group, is virtually "on board the Pompidou train." Although other centrists are still looking around for a man of their own group, interim President Alain Poher, on whom they had pinned their hopes of rallying all center forces, may not run. Meanwhile, Pompidou on the right and moderate Socialist Gaston Defferre on the left are siphoning off center support.

The Defferre candidacy is a blow to the Communists who had hoped to unite with the non-Communist left in support of a single candidate. They are cool to Defferre, who is too close to the Center for them, but may back him in the end. Given the setbacks the Communists have suffered this past year--the crisis of last May and Czechoslovakia--the party wants to avoid political isolation which running its own candidate would imply.

MIDDLE EAST

It is becoming increasingly clear that Tuesday's Israeli commando raid on the upper Nile did not produce the results claimed for it in Tel Aviv.

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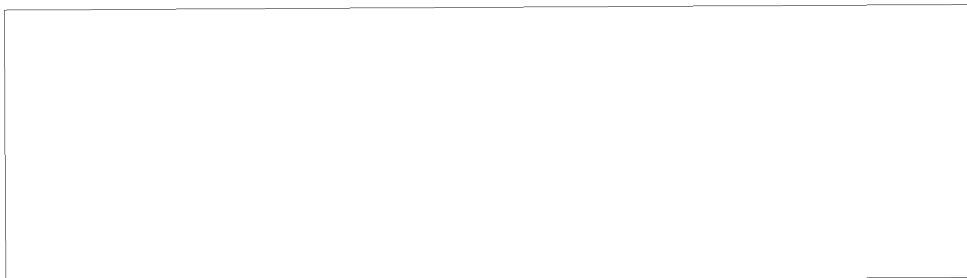
[redacted] newspapermen visiting the installations attacked by the Israelis report that nothing was seriously damaged. Even the Israelis are now saying that the raid's purpose was psychological rather than destructive.

The Israelis might feel compelled to try again in order to restore their credibility. They could even decide that something on a bigger scale is called for this time.

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VIETNAM

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Hanoi's top negotiator, Le Duc Tho, is in Moscow on his way back to Paris.

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Tho spent nearly eleven weeks in Hanoi this time--a period certainly long enough for the Politburo to have made an extensive review of the negotiations and to have assessed the spring offensive in South Vietnam. Tho's imminent return to Paris does not necessarily signal an early shift in the Communists' negotiating stance. It does suggest, however, that Hanoi expects new developments in the talks over the next few months and has dispatched Tho, armed with appropriate instructions.

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Senator Tran Van Don has told our Embassy in Saigon that he has been contacted by an intermediary, acting on behalf of a high-ranking member of the National Liberation Front, about

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the formation of a coalition government. Don alleged that the Communists had asked him to "work with" General Duong Van "Big" Minh. Don, along with Minh, played a key role in the overthrow of Diem in 1963.

Don claimed he had sent word back to the Communists that coalition government is "impossible for the moment" and that it "depends on the results in Paris." He said he had been frequently contacted this way, describing his responses as "moderately negative." In relating all this to the embassy, Don may have been fishing for our reaction to the possibility of a Don-Minh government which might be able to work out a deal along the lines of the Communists' "peace cabinet" proposals.

Don alleged--probably with a great deal of truth--that "everybody has such contacts." The hopes of a sizable number of politicians in Saigon that they might participate in a post-settlement government is an important vulnerability which we would expect the Communists to play on to the hilt. The obvious willingness of Don, and no doubt others, to keep their lines open to the Front certainly does nothing to dissuade the Communists from the belief that they are on the right track with their "peace cabinet" strategy.

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II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

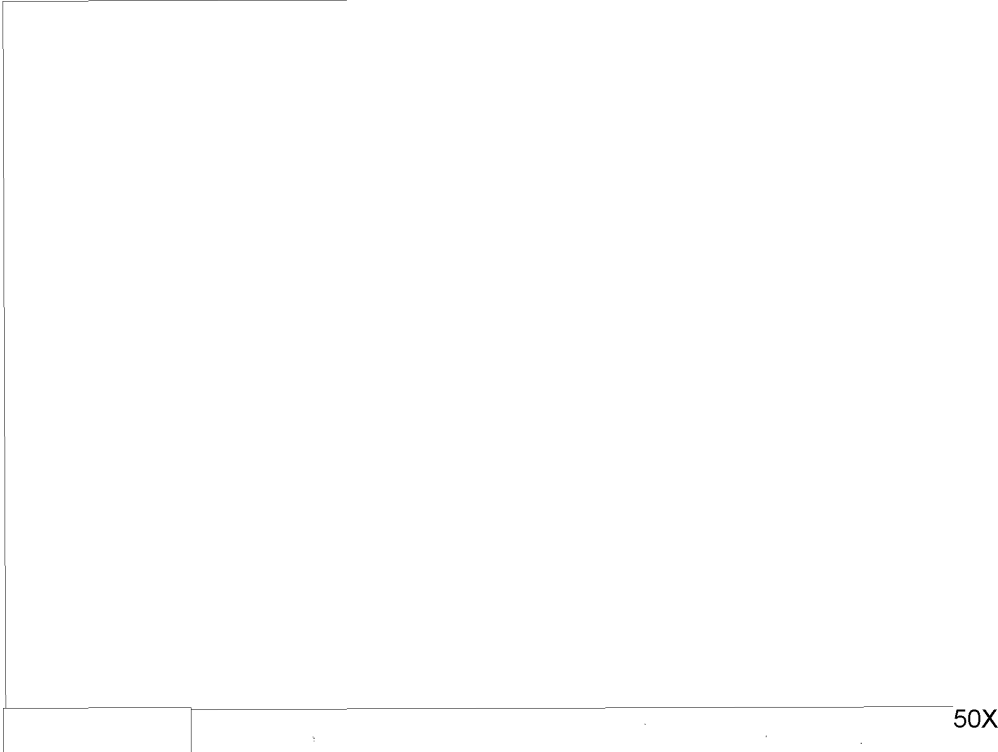
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SOVIET UNION - CHINA

Satellite photography in mid-April of Damansky/Chen Pao Island in the Ussuri River showed over a hundred craters on the part of the island nearest China and the adjacent river ice. These craters were probably caused by Soviet artillery fire during the heavy fighting on 15 March. Prepared artillery and antiaircraft positions could be seen on the Soviet side of the river, along with several tanks and over a hundred other vehicles and pieces of equipment. On the Chinese side, no comparable reinforcement was observed, but defensive positions seem to have been dug near the island.

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